

**HEADINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD
FORUM**

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY**

DOCUMENT CONTROL SHEET

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APPENDIX A – Headington Neighbourhood Plan Area Map

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1. Introduction

1.1 This Strategy has been prepared to help guide the process of community and stakeholder engagement needed to produce an informed and relevant community-led Neighbourhood Development Plan for Headington (map of the area provided in Appendix A). It explains the neighbourhood planning process, and the relevance of community engagement within this process.

1.2 This document also sets out a range of activities and actions that will be taken to draw information from the community in and around Headington. Effective engagement with local residents, community groups, businesses, institutions and service providers in Headington and adjoining areas is a crucial aspect in creating a credible plan.

1.3 The document describes the processes and methods that may be employed in community engagement activity; and presents a set of commitments to the community about how we will seek to inform, communicate with and involve them throughout the project.

1.4 An Action Plan (Appendix B) is attached to the Strategy which sets out in greater detail a proposed programme of community engagement activity and various actions needed to deliver that programme. The Action Plan will evolve as the project develops over time.

2. What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

2.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduces statutory Neighbourhood Planning in England. It enables communities to draw up a Neighbourhood Plan for their area and is intended to give communities more of a say in the development of their local area (within certain limits and parameters).

2.2 These plans will be used to decide the future of the places where people live and work, giving opportunities to:

- ◆ choose where people want new homes, shops and offices to be built;
- ◆ have a say on what new buildings should look like; and
- ◆ grant planning permission for the new buildings you want to see go ahead.

2.3 Neighbourhood plans allow local people to get the right type of development for their community, but the plans must still meet the needs of the wider area. This will mean that neighbourhood plans will have to take into account the local council's assessment of housing and other development needs in the area.

2.4 However, it goes beyond traditional ‘land-use’ planning activity, which tends to focus on regulation and control of development. Neighbourhood planning allows greater scope for plan makers, acting with the community, relevant agencies and service providers to promote and manage change in an area. This is why we need to ensure that extensive, appropriate and well-planned engagement takes place at all stages of the plan-making process.

2.5 As with all plan-making, the project requires leadership. Where Town and Parish Councils do not cover an area, The Localism Act has given that leadership role to Neighbourhood Forums. Neighbourhood forums are community groups that are designated to take forward neighbourhood planning in areas without parishes. It is the role of the local planning authority to agree who should be the neighbourhood forum for the neighbourhood area. Oxford City Council has agreed that Headington Neighbourhood Forum should be the designated forum for the area outlined in the Headington Neighbourhood Area (see Appendix A).

2.6 This carries significant responsibility in terms of producing a plan that is representative of the community. The way in which the process is led and implemented will need to secure confidence from the community in the Headington area and those organisations and businesses that serve our needs. Confidence in the process and support for the outcomes will be more certain by starting this process in a demonstrably transparent way and continuing in that way through all stages of plan preparation. We will do this by:

- ◆ showing a willingness to openly encourage opinions and suggestions from all individuals and organisations within the community whether or not these present potentially conflicting, challenging or critical views of the Plan or the process;
- ◆ presenting a reasonable, realistic, evidence based and cogently argued case to support the Plan at each stage of its preparation;
- ◆ making every effort to understand all views expressed from all individuals and groups and respond clearly on all matters raised in a timely manner; and
- ◆ demonstrating, in a form that is readily accessible and easily understood by the whole community, how the Plan reflects the views and opinions expressed during each stage of engagement and, where those views cannot legitimately be taken into account, explaining why that is the case.

3. Why do we need an Engagement Strategy?

3.1 The Engagement Strategy is a way of explaining the steps we intend to take, from the start to the end of the process. The Strategy has been prepared to demonstrate

from the start that this is a process that **needs** community involvement and that the community knows this.

- 3.2 It describes the processes and methods that may be employed in community engagement activity and presents a set of commitments to the community about how we will seek to inform, communicate with and involve them throughout the project.

4. Why is community engagement so important in the neighbourhood planning process?

- 4.1 In the past all statutory spatial plans have been prepared by the local planning authority, Oxford City Council. These plans are collectively known in legal terms as ‘the Local Plan’ and will remain in place. These plans were prepared *in consultation with* local communities. Neighbourhood Plans will be prepared **by** the community.

- 4.2 Through the Localism Act we will now have the opportunity to actually prepare the plan that shapes how the Headington area looks. We can say what type of development we wish to encourage, how much development should take place (subject to generally conforming with higher level strategic plans), where and when that development should take place, and what we want to see protected in the long term.

- 4.3 We will do this by establishing what the community says it most expects the area to look like over the coming years. We will then look to establish how relevant delivery organisations in the private, public, community and voluntary sector are able to meet those expectations.

- 4.4 Preparation of plans within a statutory framework will need to follow certain steps. These are normally prescribed in national regulations, policy and guidance from the Government. We will need to follow those regulations at appropriate stages in the process and will be guided through this by Oxford City Council.

- 4.5 Provided certain steps are taken during the preparation of the Headington Neighbourhood Plan, it will have a clear legal status and be used to make decisions on all planning matters coming forward in Headington and its adjoining areas (in relation to development proposals that may have a potential impact upon the Headington area and its community).

- 4.6 The Engagement Strategy provides a framework to show how we will approach the task of ensuring community participation and involvement at all stages of the project. An Action Plan (Appendix B) sets out what these engagement steps are, including the legal requirements for adoption of a neighbourhood plan.

5. The Community Engagement Framework

5.1 Community and stakeholder participation in any planned activity can take place on a number of different levels. These range from providing information to empowering individuals and groups to take decisions on relevant matters (and for those responsible for implementing plans to stand by those decisions). Community participation in plan-making is most likely to happen if the following processes and activities are planned to be included from the start of the project:

- ◆ **Inform:** Provide information about processes, events, issues and proposals;
- ◆ **Consult:** Obtain feedback and analysis on options and proposals;
- ◆ **Involve:** Work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure their issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered;
- ◆ **Collaborate:** Create partnership with the community in each aspect of decision making including development of options and analysis of alternatives; and
- ◆ **Empower:** Final decisions on all matters lie with the community.

5.2 Each step is normally dependent upon previous activity having been carried out. For example, successful consultation would normally follow earlier dissemination of information, and so on. It is intended that this Engagement Strategy will focus action on ensuring as much public participation and community engagement as possible is achieved. In designing each event we will ensure that involvement is encouraged by embedding all of the following key features in the process:

- ◆ **awareness raising:** to secure maximum participation.
- ◆ **timely engagement:** when involvement can make a difference.
- ◆ **inclusive engagement:** so everyone has a voice but none dominate.
- ◆ **feedback:** to show how participation makes a difference.

6. Inform

6.1 Participation and engagement can take place at an individual level; with self-forming groups having a shared interest; or through pre-arranged facilitated group discussion. Where groups form or are created as a result of the project, given sufficient support, these can usefully evolve to the extent that collaboration takes place on specific matters.

6.2 A number of interested members of the community have already formed policy groups in the following areas:

- ◆ Amenities
- ◆ Education
- ◆ Housing
- ◆ Identity
- ◆ Jobs and Development
- ◆ Retail & Business
- ◆ [Transport](#)

6.3 Direct community involvement in the Headington Neighbourhood Plan is possible through membership of these policy groups or participation in workshops planned through these groups.

6.4 These policy groups will provide the framework for **informing** the community about planned activities. They will effectively 'launch' the Headington Neighbourhood Plan through a programme of informal drop-in events in May and June 2014 across the plan area. The launch event programme is designed to raise awareness of the Headington Neighbourhood Plan, and plan making process, and to encourage direct involvement in its preparation.

6.5 This should be the start of a continuous process of information sharing and relationship building and should allow appropriate messages to get to the right people at the right time. Techniques will include:

- ◆ **written correspondence:** letters, leaflets and newsletters giving information to individuals, groups and organisations; posters displayed in the local area.
- ◆ **media coverage:** drafting press releases, advertisements about events and maintaining dialogue as necessary to secure media coverage to maintain a public media profile throughout the life of the project.
- ◆ **public exhibitions:** mainly in the form of informal drop-in sessions where information can be provided and initial opinions gathered.
- ◆ **face-to-face meetings:** planned discussions with local groups and people in the community.

7. Consult

7.1 The consultation phase of the project will include two formal legally required processes to **consult** the community, and an ongoing informal engagement and consultation process.

7.2 During the first formal process, we will produce a draft vision and aims of the neighbourhood plan. We will also identify, following on from the 'informing' process carried out through the policy groups, the issues and options in the Headington Neighbourhood Plan Area. This document, the Vision, Aims, Issues and Options Report, will help us gather views about what should be included in the plan. This process is programmed to start in July 2014 and to last for 6 weeks.

7.3 Once we have carried out our Community Engagement programme, and identified and evaluated all the available evidence, we will produce a draft Headington Neighbourhood Plan. This is programmed for October 2014. We will then formally consult on this plan for a further period of 6 weeks. Further comments and information provided by the community will be used to finalise the Plan.

7.4 Once the final Draft Headington Neighbourhood Plan is produced, which is programmed for January 2015, Oxford City Council are required to consult on it for a further 6 weeks. They will publicise the document, inviting comments on the content of the document.

7.5 Throughout this process, we will continue to informally **consult** the community using a range of appropriate techniques:

- ◆ **community profiling:** creating a shared picture with the community of the physical, human, social, economic and community characteristics, assets and issues found in an area.
- ◆ **organised discussion groups:** such as focus groups which allow small group discussions that give in-depth consideration to relevant local issues surrounding specific topics.
- ◆ **surveys:** such as resident opinion polls and questionnaire based surveys where responses to questions about specific issues are gathered in writing. These can take the form of door-to-door or street interviews; postal questionnaires; web-based, electronic and social media hosted surveys; and telephone interviews.

8. Involve

8.1 Moving towards a position where we **involve** the community we will need further intensive dialogue with the community and will need to establish mechanisms to give a voice to those who wish to comment on or contribute towards plan-making, and to seek to engage with those who are often more difficult to reach. Techniques used when

we inform and consult with the community will be relevant as will additional activities including:

- ◆ **networking:** which is about identifying and talking to a range of different individuals and interest groups in the community and developing and nurturing relationships with those people
- ◆ **public events:** such as ‘Open House’ events which involve the use of a local venue as a drop-in centre, allowing people to gather information and share their views. Interactive displays and project leadership presence offers further opportunities to gather comments and information. It also gives an opportunity to develop personal relationships with people and groups who may wish to increase their involvement

9. Collaborate

9.1 An initial step where collaboration has already taken place is the creation of a stakeholder group (the Forum) where various voices in the community have helped in forming a draft shared vision for the area.

9.2 As the project develops we can explore further opportunities to **collaborate** with the community. This level of participation is generally resource intensive for both the lead plan-making body and the community and is likely to involve only a few dedicated groups or individuals. We have not identified a formal process for collaboration, but welcome the opportunity to engage in this intensive discussion with stakeholders.

10. Empower

10.1 The final decision as to whether the Headington Neighbourhood Plan is adopted lies in the hands of the community. We believe that through this engagement process we will **empower** the community to become involved in developing the plan, and in agreeing it. A final referendum on whether the plan should be adopted will be held on the 7th May 2015, and all people registered to vote in local elections within the Headington Neighbourhood Plan Area will be eligible to cast a vote as to whether this plan is adopted.

11. Our Commitments

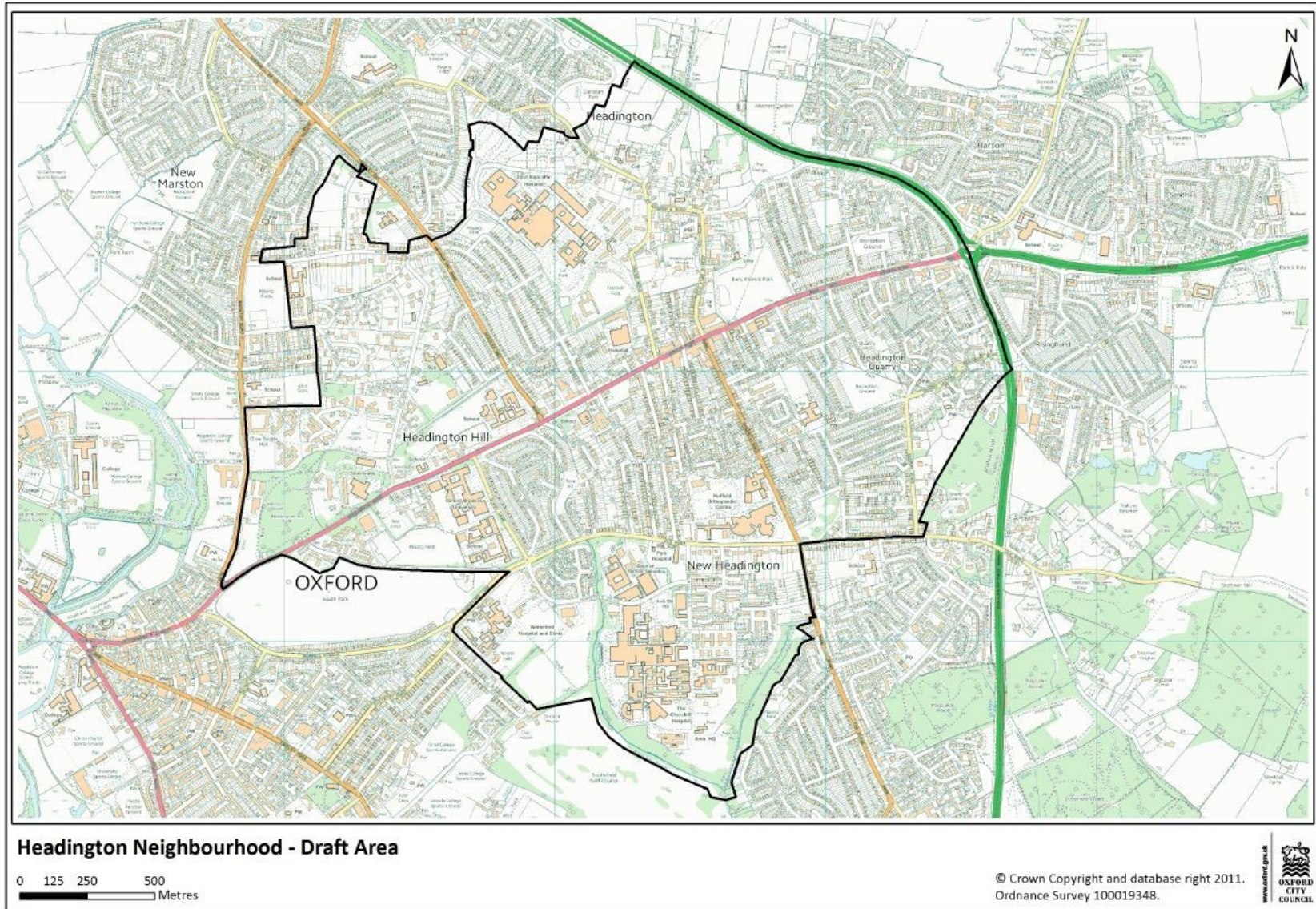
11.1 Headington Neighbourhood Forum as the lead organisation in the Headington Neighbourhood Plan project, through the wider Steering Group, has agreed to adopt a set of key commitments on community and stakeholder engagement revolving around transparency and inclusivity, but subject to proportionality. These are presented as an

agreed set of actions and approaches to engagement that we will offer to the community as part of this project:

- ◆ Undertake a Launch Event Programme to raise awareness of the Headington Neighbourhood Plan and encourage engagement in the process
- ◆ Undertaking a 6 week consultations on a Vision, Aims, Issues and Options Report and a formal 6 week consultation on the Draft Headington Neighbourhood Plan
- ◆ A website will be provided for information sharing prior to the launch of the project and will be maintained throughout the plan making process
- ◆ Regular press releases will be provided giving activity updates
- ◆ Information will be provided through local newsletters
- ◆ All information collected to inform plan making will be openly available
- ◆ Local permanent exhibitions and displays will be provided in accessible locations to support events and give information throughout the period of all publicised consultation events
- ◆ Communication will take place in a form best suited to each person or group as expressed by them
- ◆ An open agreement to meet with individuals and groups throughout the project whatever their views and opinions as resources reasonably allow
- ◆ Respond within a reasonable time to all written representations demonstrating how comments have been taken into account and how the plan has been informed by those comments
- ◆ Explore all opportunities to involve anyone in the community in preparing the plan at all stages of the project
- ◆ Where comments and suggestions are made that are not directly relevant to the Neighbourhood Development Plan we will record these and pass the comments on to the appropriate person or organisation for action

11.2 In return we will ask only that anyone seeking to participate by providing information, opinions or analysis of proposals at any stage of the project is prepared to do so in writing to ensure that all comments can be properly noted as a true record of their views. Once we reach the stages in the process where statutory guidance has to be followed we will be required to publish comments made about the Plan.

Appendix A – Headington Neighbourhood Plan Area map



Appendix B – Community Engagement Action Plan

Date(s)	Responsible Group	Stakeholder/s Engaged	Method of Engagement	Method of Feedback	Comments
29/01/14	ISG	Forum	Report	Comments on Project Plan and CES	This is an Example